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ABSTRACT

Since the implementation of an open admissions policy at Bronx Community College (BCC) in 1970, the majority of incoming students have been socially, economically, and academically disadvantaged. In 1978, one out of three students had a native language other than English; 46% came from households with an income of less than $5,000; 68% were placed in remedial reading or English courses; and 45% were placed in remedial mathematics courses. A consequence of these disadvantages and of a systemwide stiffening of academic standards in Fall 1976 was a large increase in the number of students suspended or placed on probation. In Fall 1977, 3,706 of 8,845 students failed to meet retention standards. In order to reduce the high attrition rate at BCC, a special seven-week course entitled Probationary Workshop Program (PWP-99) was developed to focus on the reasons for and implications of probation, the revised grading system, academic regulations, and students' and teachers' responsibility for student success. Although the course was well received by participants, a study conducted in Spring 1979 revealed no significant relationship between participation in the course by probationary students and their academic performance that semester, and called for revisions of the course. These revisions should be based on a follow-up of students who took the course and performed well in their courses and a study of students who attended very few PWP-99 sessions. (The PWP-99 syllabus is appended.) (HB)

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The Relationship Between Participation in PWP-99, A Special Course For Probationary Students At Bronx Community College, and Academic Performance

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Abstract

This investigation was undertaken to determine if a significant relationship exists between the degree of participation by probationary students in a special course entitled Probationary Workshop Program (PWP-99) and the level of their semester grade point average at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York.

The Relationship Between Participation in PWP-99,
A Special Course For Probationary Students
At Bronx Community College, and
Academic Performance

Since the inception of its open admissions policy in the Fall of 1970, the overwhelming majority of the in-coming matriculated students at Bronx Community College (BCC) of the City University of New York (CUNY) have been socially, economically, and academically disadvantaged. A demographic profile of the students admitted to the College during the Fall, 1978 semester reveals that the percentage of such students continues to increase (Bronx Community College, 1978 and 1979).

1. Eighty-eight percent were members of ethnic or racial minority groups (39% black, 46% hispanic, and 3% oriental);
2. Fifty-nine percent were female;
3. Thirty percent reported that the highest educational level attained by their fathers was elementary school graduation or lower while 28% reported that the highest educational level attained by their mothers was elementary school graduation or lower;
4. One out of three stated that a language other than English was the primary language spoken at home as a child;
5. A third reported living in households having five or more people;
6. Forty-six percent come from households with a total income of less that $5,000;
7. Thirty-two percent failed to attain a high school average over 69%;
8. Sixty-eight percent were placed in a remedial reading or remedial English course or both while 45% were placed in a remedial mathematics course.

Given their background of social, economic, and academic disadvantage, it is not surprising that, under BCC's open admissions policy, many students are eventually placed on academic probation or suspended.

After reviewing much of the data concerning CUNY's changing student population and its success as reflected in graduation, retention, and credit generation, Trivett concluded that although open admissions has been a success

in providing access to a sizeable group of previously underrepresented students, large numbers of these newcomers are not succeeding once admitted (1976, p. 5).

In 1976, CUNY's Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Timothy J. Healy, pointed out that as a result of the University's lenient retention standards, its's approaching the idea of tenured students. He stated (p. 173), "we have learned the lesson, and are correcting the balance on the side of severity".

In response to the situation which Trivett and Healy described, CUNY adopted a new set of student retention standards in the Fall of 1976 which not only include stiffer grade point average (GPA) requirements but also include rate of progress requirements (ROP). Table 1 indicates the minimum cumulative GPA and semester ROP which must be earned at specified levels of credits or equated credits (remedial coursework) attempted.

At BCC, the adoption of the new CUNY-wide retention standards resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students placed on probation or suspended. For example, at the end of the Fall, 1977 semester, 2,487 students out of a total enrollment of 8,845 (28%) failed to achieve a satisfactory cumulative GPA and were, therefore, placed on probation or suspended. In addition, 1,219 students (14%) who achieved a satisfactory GPA were unable to meet the ROP standards but were not placed on probation or suspended since the CUNY Council of Presidents decided to, temporarily, suspend the ROP standards. Consequently, 3,706 students out of 8,845 (42%) failed to meet at least one of the new retention standards. In fact, 1,809 of them failed to meet both standards.

TABLE 1
Student Retention Standards

Cumulative Number of Credits or Equated Credits Attempted	Minimum Semester[a] Rate of Progress	Minimum Cumulative[b] GPA (Index)
Less than 12	No reclassification	No reclassification
12 - 23½	50%	1.50
24 - 35½	66%	1.75
36 - Upward	75%	2.00

[a]Only grades of A, B, C, and D are considered satisfactory.
[b]A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0.

In order to reduce the high percentage of students who are suspended from BCC after having been on probation, the College's Department of Student Development initiated a special counseling program for probationary students during the Spring of 1978. The program activities of the Department during the Spring, 1978 semester were evaluated by Donnangelo (1979).

The core of the program for the Spring, 1979 semester was a special seven week course entitled Probationary Workshop Program (PWP-99). The first three sessions of the course were led by counselors from the Department of Student Development while the last four were either led by a volunteer instructor or co-led by a counselor and an instructor. The syllabus for the course is presented in the Appendix.

An evaluation questionnaire was completed by 166 of the estimated 508 students (33%) who participated in the course. A majority of the respondents considered the following aspects of the course to be very helpful.

1. Learning about a student's right to information about course requirements and the grading procedures used in a course (66%);
2. Learning the procedures for dropping courses and withdrawing from the College (60%);
3. Discussion of note-taking techniques (56%).

Fifty-one percent of the respondents indicated that signing the required PWP-99 contract encouraged them to attend sessions on time. In addition, 55% indicated that as a result of attending PWP-99, their class attendance, during the semester, was greatly improved. In general, the course was very well received by its participants.

This investigation was undertaken to determine if a significant relationship exists between the degree of participation by probationary students in PWP-99 and the level of their semester grade point average (GPA).

Method

In order to determine if a significant relationship exists between the degree of participation by probationary students in PWP-99 and the level of their semester GPA, the product-moment correlation coefficient, r, between the number of PWP-99 sessions attended and the semester GPA earned by a sample of 176 out of the estimated 508 students (35%) registered

for PWP-99 during the Spring, 1979 semester was computed. The sample consisted of all students for whom accurate attendance and academic records were available.

Results

The mean number of sessions attended by the 176 students was five which is 71% of the seven sessions in the course. In comparison to the attendance rates for other counseling programs at the College, the attendance rate for PWP-99 sessions was above average. The student's mean semester GPA was 1.79 which is less than the 2.00 cumulative degree index which is required for graduation. Finally, the product-moment correlation coefficient, r, between the number of PWP-99 sessions attended and the semester GPA earned by the 176 students was .06. Obviously, the correlation is very low or negigible. In fact, it is not significant at even the .05 level of significance despite the large size of the sample.

Discussion and Recommendations for Further Research

In spite of the fact that the PWP-99 course was well received by its participants, it appears that the quality of their academic performance during the semester in which they took the course was not related to the number of sessions they attended. Therefore, it may be concluded that the course is in need of revision.

While, as a group, the students who participated in PWP-99 during the Spring, 1979 semester did not perform well, academically, nevertheless, many individual participants performed well during the semester. Therefore, in order to properly revise the course, those students who took the course and obtained a semester GPA of 3.00 or higher should be studied, in depth, to determine which factors account for their success. Special attention should be given to those students who attended very few PWP-99 sessions. Any revisions that are made in the course should be based upon the results of this proposed investigation.

Hopefully, continuing the efforts made on behalf of probationary students will help Bronx Community College and the City University of New York, as a whole, to strengthen its commitment to offering a meaningful and enriching collegiate experience to educationally disadvantaged students.

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APPENDIX

PWP-99 SYLLABUS

PROBATIONARY WORKSHOP PROGRAM (PWP-99)

Materials	Session I
Checklist of Problems	A. Focusing inward - reason for being on probation. 1) Discuss implications of probation. 2) Discuss purpose of Probationary Workshop Program.
Contract	3) Discuss and collect signed copy of contract (distribute extras for student's reference).
	B. Review course registration for the semester.
	C. Drop and Add recommendations; refer to Registration Guide for dates and time; financial implications of course drop prior to February 22, 1979. (If student's advisement sheet shows error in judgment, counselor may recommend waiver of Change of Program fee.)
Catalog Request Form Flow Charts	D. Assisgments: 1) Bring catalog to next session. 2) Bring flow chart filled in with grades student has earned. 3) Bring transcript or previous grade reports.
	Session II
"Revised Grading" Computation Form and GPA and Its Consequences Form	A. Review revised grading system. 1) Use student's previous grades as illustration. 2) Follow up on counselor flow chart questions.
Catalog, Page 30	B. Discuss procedure to resolve ABS and INC (deadline to apply to resolve ABS grades for Fall,1978 is March 15, 1979), the CAS Appeals process and how it works.
Catalog, Pages 31-32	C. Discuss attendance regulations (note error on page 31 -- Debarment - WU grade).

PROBATIONARY WORKSHOP PROGRAM (PWP-99)

Materials	Session II (continued)
Success Means	D. Discuss student's responsibilities.
	1) Acquisition of textbooks and materials in beginning of term (sources for purchasing books at discount, use of library reference books temporarily).
	2) Know course requirements and grading procedures used in course.
	3) Meet deadlines for course projects.
Tutorial Resource List and Tutorial Time Card	4) Know tutorial resources and utilize them.
	E. Faculty Responsibilities
	1) To provide information regarding requirements for course - content and grading.
	2) To provide information regarding office hours and telephone numbers.
Referral Form	F. Discuss procedure to handle personal problems - psychologist, career, decision-making, etc.
	G. Discuss time management (Class, study, personal).
	1) Minimum study time required for success.
Time Grids	2) Assignment: Prepare seven-day week time allocation schedule.
	Session III
Drop Course and Withdrawing From College Forms	A. Review implication of time allocation for course drop prior to February 22, 1979; meeting academic and personal deadlines, e.g. financial aid.

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